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ABSTRACT

Based on a 31-question survey sent to 2,500 alternative secondary schools located across the country, this report summarizes results from the 1,200 schools responding to the questionnaire. Section 1 describes some of the structural features of alternative schools, including where they are, why they were started, organizational characteristics, size, and growth. Following a look at the students who attend alternative schools in section 2, section 3 examines the following key elements in how such schools work: (1) choice, (2) role diffusion as opposed to specialized staff, (3) autonomy, (4) evaluation, (5) costs, (6) attendance, and (7) future prospects. After a description and evaluation of the distinctive elements, learning activities, and curriculum and skills emphases of alternative school programs in section 4, section 5 provides a brief review of the alternative school experience from the perspectives of students and staff. Section 6 assesses the accomplishments and challenges of alternative education. The report's appendixes provide a sample survey questionnaire complete with tallies, bibliographical data on previous alternative school surveys, and additional information about the present survey and its history. (JBM)

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ALTERNATIVES • OPTIONS • MAGNETS

The Current Status of Schools of Choice in Public Secondary Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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PROJECT ON ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION

1982

SURVEY RESULTS: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- A vital phenomenon: 1200 schools responded to our survey, and 2500 were located; secondary alternatives are alive and well.
- Staff morale high: 90% of responding alternative school staff feel strong ownership of their programs.
- Better student-teacher relations: Most replying alternatives identify teacher-student interaction as their most distinctive feature.
- No greater cost: Per student costs in 62% of responding schools are the same, or even lower, than in other local programs.
- Origins: Responding to currently unmet student needs, and to truancy-dropout rates, are the most frequent reasons for creating alternative schools.
- Alternatives are here to stay: Half of replying schools are six-years old, or older; and almost half believe their future as secure, or more so, than other local schools.
- Kids like alternatives: Their attendance goes up in 81% of the alternative schools that wrote us -- sharply, in 38%.
- Curricula stress basics: 79% report basic skills the point of primary content emphasis.
- Alternatives don't sustain segregation: Very few alternative schools are segregated, nor do they become 'ghetto-ized.'
- Teachers the central ingredient: The most outstanding features of alternative schools are human relationships and instructional activities -- not equipment, nor facilities, nor curriculum.
- Suburban growth challenging urban domination: More than half the alternatives established since the mid-70s are in the suburbs.
- Reform potential: Alternative schools are pioneering new organizational structures, innovative forms of social control, and new varieties of learning activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our list of programs to be surveyed was assembled in a variety of ways: through letters to alternative school people we knew, and to state departments of education, and superintendents of schools in towns and cities of more than 50,000. State contact people of the NEA's Division of Instruction and Professional Development responded most helpfully to a request for names of programs, especially of suburban alternatives. Officials of Kettering's /I/D/E/A/ kindly shared their high school mailing list, as did officers of state and regional alternative education associations. A number of periodicals also helped, by running announcements of the survey and requests for the names of alternative schools: Changing Schools, The Unicorn, Phi Delta Kappan, ASCD Update, NASSP News Leader, NEA Now, and AACTE Briefs. And many survey respondents gave us the names of additional programs to receive our questionnaire. We want to thank all of these and many other people for their help -- every individual who wrote, called or sent us names.

In addition to the help of the National Institute of Education acknowledged below, the substantial assistance of the National Education Association must also be noted. The NEA's Research Division handled all of the computer work for us -- all the way from the key punching of each questionnaire reply to the delivery of the two-foot stack of printouts which underlie this report. Our thanks to Al Sheriden and Andy Griffin. The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education helped immensely by serving as grantee and contributing its services. Many thanks to Jack Kleinmann and Joan Alikhani.

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Our thanks to all -- and the hope that all who helped by returning questionnaires will be pleased to have had an important part in this report.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a report of the most extensive survey of the nation's public, secondary alternative schools ever undertaken. The survey confirmed some hypotheses about alternative education, generated new questions and fresh speculations, and should lay some myths to rest. This report marks the completion of the first phase of an extended inquiry into alternative schools designed by the Project on Alternatives in Education (PAE). Subsequent phases of the research will explore 100 of the surveyed programs in greater detail and will culminate in on-site study of 30 of them.

PAE was launched in 1976 with the intent of undertaking a contemporary parallel to the Eight-Year Study -- seeking, as that inquiry did, to encourage high school reform through research. A brief abstract of the Project, its Steering Committee and participant sponsors, and a list of other Project products are included on page 36 of this report.

We sought first to identify the nation's secondary alternative schools, and then to inquire about their structure and practice. We located 2500 public alternatives operating at the secondary level, and have listed them in the Project's Directory: Public Secondary Alternative Schools in the United States and Several Canadian Provinces. We sent a 31-question survey to each of the 2500. This report tells the story of what we learned from the 1200 schools replying to our questions. It has been prepared for an audience of school people and educational decision-makers. It is not a technical or statistical report. We've included what we believe to be most valuable to people with an interest in alternative education.

The report is organized this way: The opening section describes some of the structural features of alternatives, such as where they are, why they were started, organizational characteristics, size and growth. The second section looks at the students who attend alternative schools; the third examines what seem to be the key elements in how such schools work. After a look at programs (section four), we provide a brief review from the particular perspectives of their students and staff -- to see alternative schools from the vantage point of those within them. And finally, the sixth section assesses the record of alternative education, its accomplishments and challenges.

Our questionnaire appears as Appendix A on pages 29-32, and we have entered replies, in percentages, on the reproduction. The answers to some of our questions could not meaningfully be reported this way, however (e.g., answers to questions 1 and 2), and this largely accounts for the few tables included in the body of the report.

We found earlier national surveys on alternative schools useful to interpreting our findings. There have been reports of five such surveys: the 1972 findings of Indiana University's National Consortium for Options in Public Education (NCOPE); the 1974 report of the National Alternative Schools Program at the University of Massachusetts (NASP); the 1975 report from Indiana where, meanwhile, NCOPE had become ICOPE --

the International Consortium for Options in Public Education; the 1976 report of the National School Boards Association (NSBA); and the 1977 updated NASP survey. These reports are cited, as comparisons to our own findings become useful. (Full citations and publication details on these reports appear as Appendix B on page 33.)

We have included further detail about the construction of the survey, and its interpretation, as Appendix C, pages 34-35. For most readers, however, perhaps the only other question that needs preliminary attention is "What is an alternative school?" Answers differ, and so we made one object of our study the question of how the term or idea is operationally defined in American schools. We found a number of different versions, and included the replies of all, despite the fact that some conceptions violate what others hold most central. For instance, in some parts of the country "alternatives" are synonymous with in-school suspension programs -- while in most others, the idea of entrance by choice is perhaps the single most important ingredient. Only one kind of answer, however, tended to be systematically excluded: that was the reply of the "alternative" consisting only of a single course or a set of curricular offerings. Here, the decision was made by the fact that our questionnaire was ill-suited to describing such arrangements -- and a few uncompleted forms were returned noting that.

Our plan to make use of the "alternatives" label an object of study led to some important information about that usage. It had its costs, however -- including the listing of schools in some regions very like schools excluded from our list in others. It also led to the self-exclusion of some programs we wanted to include -- e.g., the optional programs in areas where "alternatives" mean punitive programs. We were able to identify and overcome that problem in some cases -- though doubtless not in all.

SITES AND STRUCTURES

Number and Location

Our respondents include schools of various sorts addressed to a variety of age groups. Although we were formally concerned only with alternatives where students of secondary school age are enrolled, such alternatives come in a large assortment of types. Thus our replies come from the following:

I. Survey Respondents*

625 senior highs
235 junior-senior highs
131 junior highs
40 middle schools
55 K-12 schools
7 K-7 or 8 schools

Earlier surveys -- by NCOPE in 1972 and NASP in 1974 -- found that alternative schools were far more prevalent at the secondary than at the elementary school level. We suspect that continues to be true, but we cannot confirm it since we asked only about secondary alternatives.

Current programs are scattered across the continent and are found in all regions and in all types of areas. There are states with distinct concentrations of alternative schools, but we found no state where there are none. West Virginia seems the state least affected by the alternatives idea, with just one alternative school -- an ironic reminder of the Kanawha County upheaval of several years ago. At the other end of the spectrum -- and the nation -- we found approximately 300 high school level alternatives in California.

California, New York, and Washington continue to have large numbers of alternative schools. We say "continue" because NASP also found concentrations within these states in their 1974 and 1975 surveys. Indeed, the first alternatives survey (NCOPE) had concluded in 1972 that 40% of the nation's alternative schools were to be found in these three states. There are also now substantial numbers -- 100 or more alternatives -- in Michigan, Illinois, and Oregon.

Florida and Texas also report concentrations of alternatives, launched over the past several years. A major percentage of them are

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* Although we have received replies from 1200 schools, not all arrived in time to be included in all tallies. Most of our figures are based on 1121 replies -- but as is the case with this table, not all respondents answered every question.

quite different, however, from those elsewhere classified alternatives. They consist of in-school suspension and other types of punitive programs, and they are alternatives to suspension, not to other types of education. These programs often bear little similarity to the magnet or

II. Regional Location of Responding Alternatives

Region	Percentage
Far West	21
Rocky Mountains - Plains	16
South	20
Great Lakes	20
Atlantic	21
Canada	1

optional schools also found in some Southern cities. Although such optional programs have also spread in the South, our findings suggest that the Southern states, and the Rocky Mountain - Plains states, have fewer optional schools, or alternatives of the non-punitive sort, than are found in other parts of the nation.

The West Coast, the East Coast, and the Great Lakes areas still appear the points of major concentration, as they did in 1977. Alternative schools evidently have been deemed successful in some areas, where they continue to spread.

We also found evidence for concluding that alternatives are not the fly-by-night or short-lived structures some have claimed. A seventh of the programs responding to our survey were established before 1970; a third were established between 1971 and 1975; 44% began between 1976 and 1980; and 7% are new programs starting in 1981 or early 1982. This means that approximately half of our responding programs were at least six years old -- which suggests durability for individual programs, as well as continuing growth for the alternatives movement in general.

Growth

Alternative schools are continuing to increase in number, and many individual alternatives are continuing to grow in size. There is also evidence that more would become larger, were they not held to enrollment limits.

Forty-five percent of our respondents reported enrollment growth over the past several years, as compared to other district schools. Only 14% reported declines; 41% indicated no change in size -- but a number of them noted that their replies are misleading, since enrollment ceilings restrict them to a no-growth situation. Convictions as to the value of smallness may have something to do with such limits -- as may the size of facilities. (But such possibilities don't explain why other alternatives are not established to accommodate overflow.)

Other evidence also testifies to a continuing spread. The state directory of Washington's alternatives reports that the number there has doubled since 1976. And San Diego County's current alternatives list proclaims it is the largest ever within the county. Los Angeles has recently extended its burgeoning magnet program to the secondary level. Cincinnati continues to expand its list of magnets. And one district in Manhattan has diversified secondary education and put all programs on an options basis.

It appears that suburban districts are catching up with urban as the major locus of new alternatives. Our findings do not show the strong urban dominance of earlier reports which claimed as many as two urban alternative schools for every suburban one. The number of responding suburban programs established since 1976 suggests that a more even balance is well on the way -- because they number well more than half the total alternatives established since that year.

III. Locale Concentrations

Locale	Percentage
Urban	44
Suburban	27
Rural	9
Mixed*	21

Overall numbers have changed enormously, showing a steady growth pattern. The 1972 NCOPE survey located 464 public alternatives at all grade levels, 1-12. By 1975, 1250 such schools and programs had been identified. The NSBA reported in 1976 that two-thirds of the nation's larger school districts were operating alternative schools; and the 1977 NASP directory listed more than 1300. In 1981, we identified 2500 programs at the secondary level alone -- and we suspect there are several times that many. Whether or not this is so, there seems good reason for concluding that the number of alternative schools continues to increase quite steadily.

Organizational Type

Alternatives reflect a wide array of organizational types and auspices. Some are part of a single school, others are district-wide. Some have been jointly established by several districts or counties, and some even by entire states.

Most typically, the alternative is a separate school (38%). But the school-within-a-school and mini-school arrangements are also widespread (20%). Satellite and annex arrangements are much less frequent (9%), as are schools-without-walls where the community is really the site of instruction (1%). The early dominance of the school-without-walls variety of alternative education was not long-lived. The per-

* Drawing students from several types of locales

centage of alternatives of this type had decreased from 22% in 1973 to 6% by the time of the 1975 ICOPE survey. The subsequent development of other organizational forms has reduced the relative number still further -- although individual programs such as Parkway, the first school-without-walls, continue to thrive.

Alternative schools show considerable diversity as to organizational type, as well as to program. But some of the types we learned about would not be considered alternatives on most understandings of that term. For instance, 13% of our respondents identified themselves as remedial or corrective programs to which students are temporarily assigned. Yet most alternative school definitions emphasize choice as crucial; most assume long-term, not temporary affiliation, with the possibility of remaining in the alternative until graduation; and many definitions stipulate that the alternative reflect a population representative of the district rather than a special group deficient in some regard.

Almost 100 of our respondents describe their programs as just "a course offering within the parent school" -- which closes off to them one of the most fundamental features of the alternative school idea: establishing a distinct identifiable unit or entity with its own staff and students, and some degree of organizational coherence and separateness from other units. Even though sets or sequences of course offerings may involve the same group of students and teachers, they are not alternatives on most definitions if they lack this organizational separateness. Or, to put it otherwise, on most views curricular innovations or add-ons do not, by themselves, constitute alternative schools or programs.

Origins

Most alternative schools are established for either or both of two reasons: to respond to student needs that are not being met in regular programs (e.g., for a more challenging environment, for more diversified learning activities); or, they are established to respond more explicitly to the particular problems of truancy and dropout rates. Both reasons are cited as major factors by 65% of responding schools. It is not necessarily, however, the same 65% citing both factors. (Question 4 invited people to check as many factors as were important in the creation of their school.) The difference in these two generating factors is important because it sometimes distinguishes those alternatives begun largely for educational improvement purposes, from those launched to solve problems posed by particular groups. -- Or, as some might see it, the difference is a matter of reform and improvement purposes versus system-serving purposes. The first purpose accords with the options idea; the second tends to yield alternatives for special populations like slow learners, the disruptive, etc.

This difference suggests a continuing ambiguity about the alternatives label and movement: whether it pertains to diversifying education for all students, or whether it pertains to programs aimed at particular student groups. We were told that most of the school districts

represented by respondents -- 73% -- see alternative education as something for all students, not just some one type. But approximately half told us they were established in response to discipline problems, somewhat fewer in response to underachievement.

Alternatives for different student groups have different origins. Those serving lower-class children were established to get these youngsters to school regularly and keep them there. Truancy and dropout problems are major factors in the creation of 80% of the alternatives where such youngsters predominate. But the school's holding power is known to be higher with students of middle and upper class families. So most alternatives where such students predominate were established as a result of less fundamental "unmet needs."

Desegregation concerns played a surprisingly small part in producing the alternatives replying to us: only 12% reported segregation to have been a major factor in the school's creation. We can't be sure whether the reason is that desegregation-inspired magnet schools are much fewer than supposed; whether we failed to find large numbers that are there; or whether they responded to our survey at relatively lower rates than other types of alternatives. Our guess is that the last of these reasons may figure prominently. It is based on the hypothesis that magnets resemble regular schools more than do other types of alternatives in several key ways -- including the lack of staff morale and enthusiasm leading people to participate in surveys.

Size (and Cost)

Alternative schools are small: more than a third of them enroll 50 or fewer students; more than half, fewer than 100 students; and 69% have enrollments of 200 or less. Still, a surprising 17% of our total,

IV. Enrollment

Student	Percentage
50 or fewer	35
51 - 100	19
101 - 200	15
201 - 300	6
301 - 500	8
Over 500	17

mostly in urban areas, enroll more than 500. Approximately two-thirds of the suburban schools we heard from have 100 or fewer students, but this is true only of 43% of the urban schools. Yet 62% of the urban schools have 200 or fewer students.

Staff totals are very small: 57% of the schools we surveyed have no more than six teachers, and a fifth operate with no administrator. In most, however (54%), there is one administrator. Student-teacher ratios tend to be very favorable: over half the schools have no more

than 18 students per teacher and nearly a quarter report ratios of less than 12 per teacher. One supplementary form of assistance earlier available to alternative schools, however, no longer seems to be: 82% of our respondents report that they have no interns or student teachers, while the 1974 NASP survey found large numbers. The reason for the change is far more probably that teacher education institutions do not have the students to send than a choice on the part of the alternatives.

V. Number of Teachers

Number	Percentage
1 - 3	37
4 - 6	20
7 - 10	11
11 - 15	7
16 - 20	3
Over 20	23

The relatively high staff concentration does not seem to make for proportionately greater costs, however -- since alternatives frequently make do with less-than-lavish facilities and equipment. About two-thirds of our respondents (62%) reported per student expenditures equal to or lower than those of other schools within the district. It seems that optimal size in terms of costs is 201-300 students: 71% of such programs operate on the same or lower costs than other local schools.

VI. Student-Teacher Ratios

Students Per Teacher	Percentage
Under 12	24
13 - 18	28
19 - 21	12
22-25	11
26-30	9
Over 30	16

Smaller does not necessarily mean costlier, however, since even among the smallest programs, 59% manage on the same or less than other schools. It is the case that 39% of the relatively more costly programs enroll 50 or fewer; on the other hand, 18% of the more expensive programs are the largest we found, enrolling more than 500.

There appear to be relationships between the size of an alternative school and the kind of students it enrolls: the smaller programs tend toward higher concentrations of students who enter with academic and other problems. More than 80% of the smaller programs reported this to be true of a majority of their students; fewer than 40% of the largest schools indicated this to be so.

STUDENT INFORMATION

Are alternative schools for those who just can't get along in conventional schools? Or do alternatives represent equally acceptable options for students who simply desire a different sort of education than what is standardly available? There are people of both persuasions, and alternative schools and their students reflect the two quite different views. Some replies to our questions reveal considerable ambivalence within single programs.

Three-quarters of our respondents told us that their communities associate the idea of alternative education with all kinds of students, not just one or another specific type. This is good news for those interested in encouraging a variety of deliberately differentiated educations; the options concept may really be taking hold. On the other hand, replies to other questions -- such as the main factors in creating a particular alternative -- suggest that they are often begun in order to accommodate "special needs" populations.

It seems that today's particular combination of public criticism and economic difficulties is heightening the tendency to aim new programs at those worst served by present schools. Thus, despite considerable rhetoric about options and choice, current circumstances seem to invite the crisis approach of responding on an individual basis and only to the most urgent situations. There seems relatively less attention to system-wide change for all students (again, despite considerable rhetoric to the contrary). And such a system-level approach will probably be important to generating differentiated choices for all, as opposed to a single alternative for those in direst need. In any event, student dissatisfaction, apathy, and underachievement explain the beginnings of a number of today's alternative schools: 69% of our respondents report that a majority of their entering students are functioning below local achievement norms; and 62% report that their entrants have presented behavioral problems at their previous schools.

The evidence suggests that alternatives are not functioning to segregate particular ethnic groups. They do not generally reflect high concentrations of particular groups, and few report a focus on ethnic

VII. Student Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds

Percentage of Student Body	Group			
	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Asian
0	22%	32%	60%	59%
1 - 19	35%	52%	35%	39%
20 - 39	16%	9%	2%	1%
40 - 59	14%	4%	-	-
60 - 79	7%	1%	-	-
80 - 99	6%	1%	1%	-
100	0.4%	0.1%	1%	0.2%

studies. Our findings should allay concerns that alternative schools might lead to increased segregation. There is little tendency for them to maintain racial segregation. We did not ask about how the racial composition of the schools we surveyed compared with that of their home districts. But general absence of high racial concentrations suggest that the situation may have remained as the 1974 NASP survey reported it, with alternative school racial breakdowns generally reflecting district totals.

The situation seems a bit different, however, with respect to class stratification. Here replies reveal more evidence of division — although it may be the case that they reflect less such division than neighboring schools. In the absence of comparative data, we simply do not know. We learned that no single socio-economic class predominates (to the extent of a three-fifths representation) in 38% of responding schools. But another 37% are alternatives where three-fifths or more of the students come from lower class homes; and 24% are programs where middle class backgrounds predominate to the same extent. Only 1% of our respondents represent schools where youngsters from upper class homes predominate. (Of the numerous possible explanations of that last figure, one may be that in the absence of definitions of class membership, distinctions between upper class and upper middle class are harder to draw than the more familiar lower class - middle class distinction.) It thus appears that more than a third of public alternative schools are mixed, rather than single-class schools; almost an equal number are distinctively 'working class' schools; and a fourth are middle class schools. But again, whether this reflects more or less stratification than other schools in the same areas is not known.

KEY FEATURES

Choice

Many who have speculated about the success of alternative schools hold choice to be the key. Irrespective of what happens within the school, say some, the idea that one has chosen it -- and can "unchoose" -- is alone enough to produce special ties and effects. We were therefore most interested to learn whether and how many alternatives are schools of genuine choice. Responders told us that an overwhelming number are: 79%. Moreover, the number of alternatives whose teachers have chosen the school is even higher than the number whose students have: 85%.

Since it was clear that some of our replies came from punitive and some from remedial programs, we wanted to be especially sure of the extent to which alternative school students really choose their schools, as opposed to being assigned there or "referred" under pressure. We therefore devised a method of checking the genuineness of the choice reported* -- and convinced ourselves that choice is indeed a feature of 79% of the schools that replied to us.

Advocates of alternative schools and options systems commonly emphasize the value of choice for students and their families. Not many of them have stressed its value so far as teachers are concerned. Yet when one looks at the replies of the alternatives that have been most successful in expanding, and in effecting the largest attendance increases, teacher choice seems to have been an even more constant feature than student choice! The differences are not great, but they are constant.

As will be seen in the section on "Autonomy," the fact that a student chooses to enter an alternative does not imply unlimited choice within it; but the power to "vote with one's feet" evidently matters a great deal. There was considerable diversity among the choice schools, so it cannot be said that they are highly similar in other respects. There was one interesting contrast, however: we found evidence that alternatives chosen by their students and teachers are more concerned than others with helping students learn how to learn. Almost four times as many such alternatives stress learning skills (which we explained as critical and analytic thinking, in question 24) than is the case in the non-choice alternatives.

The profile of the no-choice 'alternatives' which took shape reveals that most have been established since 1976. They are more likely to be of minimum size (under 50) than other alternatives, to enroll predominantly lower class students, and to stress career and vocational education curricula. Such schools are a small minority, however, of

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* We compared replies to our question about choice (question 5) with such other indicators as school names, descriptive materials, and replies to question 9-7.

those calling themselves "alternatives." It seems that choice is indeed a pervasive feature of alternative schools -- for teachers as well as for students. And there is evidence for concluding that this is a fundamental feature of the most effective alternatives.

Role Diffusion as Opposed to Specialized Staff

We found strong evidence in responding sch of the role "diffusion" or "extension" which appears important to iding alienation on the part of students and staff alike. Observers comment on the specialization of jobs and roles that has occurred within schools over the past several decades. Alternatives represent a counter-trend, with small staffs taking on multiple functions. Moreover, it seems clear that it is conviction as well as necessity which recommends the sharing and melding of job responsibilities and titles. Responding schools stress the importance of student-teacher interaction more than any other single feature: alternative school teachers want to be more than content specialists, and they feel it important to work with their students in other ways.

About half the schools who wrote us have neither counselors nor custodians, so some of the added functions are clear. As already noted, nearly 20% of these schools have no administrator. And even in those which do, teachers are likely to share in tasks elsewhere assigned administrators, and vice versa. For instance, as the 1974 NASP survey pointed out, alternative school administrators spend more time in teaching and interacting with students, and teachers in most alternatives spend time in public and community relations activities. Job descriptions are simply much broader for all staff in alternative schools. As one respondent summed it up, "I perform all duties from director to custodian."

Autonomy

Do alternative schools obtain enough independence so that staff can design and carry out their own vision of schooling? Our data say they do -- a remarkable finding at a time when most educators report feelings of powerlessness. We asked what sort of control resides within the alternative, with respect to seven different decision areas central to a school's operation. Almost all respondents (92%) report extensive control over teaching and learning activities -- in effect, over choosing the methods of instruction; 91%, over program planning; 76% over course content, or operative curriculum. Our computed index reveals that 96% of our respondents believe that a great deal of control resides within the school.

The evidence is also clear that this power is in turn shared among staff. Participation patterns avoid re-creating the central authority of typical secondary schools. For example, in more than 80% of the higher autonomy schools, teachers have an important role in staff hiring and budget allocation decisions. Academically-related decisions (e.g., school goals, course availability and content) are more often shared with students than with parents -- and interestingly, student participation in most of the decision areas we asked about tends to increase with

the school's power. Thus, schools that say they enjoy greater independence more often report that students take a significant part in decisions than do schools with less autonomy.

And how do students participate? We saw little evidence of the approach more common in the early days of alternatives when students alone were expected to come up with decisions (e.g., in student courts), or held the power to outvote teachers (in town meetings). But on a number of matters, significant roles in decision-making are reported for both teachers and students -- suggesting that the participatory democracy model which was earlier widespread may have given way to the more educationally-oriented model of teacher-student planning.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the alternative school appears to be a continuing feature of life within it. In contrast to the typical conventional school where program evaluations may be rare and infrequent, 85% of our respondents report undergoing regular formal evaluation. In 89% of the cases, people from outside the alternative are the evaluators. But alternative school personnel are apparently themselves concerned with evaluating what they do, since 67% indicate their staff to be involved regularly in formal program evaluation. And although we sought no indication of it, the frequent evaluations may yield a heightened awareness of problems and permit better and quicker corrective measures.

Alternative school people are sometimes puzzled about the continuing need to prove their right to exist, since other schools seem at some point to have established that right without having to renew it annually. Others, however, seem to welcome the opportunity to display their achievements. It may be that the unusual autonomy of alternative schools has generated the frequent evaluation as the monitoring mechanism in lieu of the extensive controls governing other schools. If so, the bargain may be a very good one. Assuming the evaluations are appropriately designed, conducted, and used, the arrangement might be worthy of emulation.

Costs

Do alternatives cost more? From the survey, the answer is: Perhaps in the past, but not now. As already noted, 62% of the schools we heard from report per student costs at or below standard local levels. Only a third of suburban alternatives -- and 40% of the urban -- report greater expense to their districts, with urban schools perhaps referring to magnet school transportation and equipment costs. (Half the alternatives stressing career and vocational education curricula were more costly than other local programs -- a figure noticeably higher than that associated with other curricular emphases.)

Some targeted programs do cost more. Although 60-70% of the programs designed for turned off students, or for gifted students, cost no

more than other local programs, about half of the alternatives with concentrations of lower class students reported greater relative expense -- suggesting, perhaps, that alternatives are being used in an effort to equalize educational opportunity. This possibility receives further support from the finding that most of the alternatives which cost more than other local schools -- 74% -- are programs whose students enter as low achievers.

Independent study was a prominent feature of many responding schools. There was no connection, however, between this kind of offering and the relative costliness of programs -- probably because different kinds of independent study arrangements averaged out costs: internships and other forms of experiential learning typically reduce costs substantially, while some other arrangements -- such as teacher tutorials -- can increase them.

Expenditures appear irrelevant to attractiveness to students: attendance increases are reported by almost equal numbers of relatively costlier and relatively less expensive schools (with even a slight edge for the latter). Nor do costs seem to rule the politics of school survival: in 48% of the schools reporting themselves to be more secure than regular programs in their districts, expenditures are higher than local averages. On the other hand, a third of the alternatives in imminent danger cost less than comparable local schools!

Attendance

Alternatives stand out for their students' commitment and good attendance -- a tribute, perhaps, to the teachers' emphasis on relations with students. Reporters for 81% of responding schools claimed increases, with 38% reporting attendance greatly increased in the alternative, as compared to previous patterns. Even higher percentages of improvement are reported by programs aimed at recapturing dropouts and truants: 89% of such schools report attendance increases; 46% show sharp increases. In only 18% of responding programs does attendance remain unchanged; and fewer than 1% -- a total of nine schools -- show decreases.

So far as attendance is concerned, alternatives have their strongest positive effects on older students (of senior high age), on lower class students, on low achievers, and on students whose behavior has been a problem. Programs enrolling large percentages of any of these groups report attendance increases well above the 81% average for all respondents. Among the alternatives reporting sharp increases, it appears that more of them emphasize teacher-student interaction and instructional methods than do others -- and that larger numbers of such programs reflect the highest school autonomy levels.

Resources don't seem to have much to do with student attendance: 84% of the relatively costlier alternatives show increases, while 85% where expenditures fall below local averages also show such increases.

In which alternatives do attendance problems persist? Big ones, mostly; those more closely resembling conventional schools in size.

Smallness is probably not a direct cause of improved attendance; but it does appear important to allowing a quality of interaction hard to sustain in large institutions.

Prospects

Which schools see themselves enduring and prospering? Little ones seem troubled: 63% of the smallest (fewer than 50 students) reflect some to severe insecurity. Large ones are more self-confident: such concerns were expressed by fewer than a third of the schools numbering more than 500. More alternatives predominantly serving lower-class students reflect insecurity than is expressed by programs for middle-class students (59% to 49%) -- which may reflect the well-known troubles of the cities, as well as class-related impact differences.

Our findings are not reassuring so far as the interests of low achieving students are concerned. In fact there seems a clear relationship between the ability of alternatives students and the security of their programs: more programs for under-achievers are insecure than is the case with programs for average students. And more alternatives for the gifted and talented perceive themselves secure than do programs for average students.

Relationships between program and prospects may suggest that those determining an alternative's future still see things in fairly conventional educational terms: The alternatives that feel safest -- safer even than other local schools -- tend to identify their distinctiveness primarily in terms of instructional methods or curricula. They are not the alternatives reporting that other kinds of departures are important to them.

We cannot be sure, of course, that our respondents really know what their prospects are -- and the extent to which they do probably varies considerably. But answers to question 14 surely reveal respondents' sense of security. Mild insecurity indications need not be negative. In fact, a sense of threat to something valued may heighten loyalties and redouble efforts. It would be hard to argue, however, that the 13% of responding alternatives perceiving themselves in imminent danger can be benefited in any way by that predicament.

PROGRAM

The Distinctive Elements

Alternative schools represent the institutionalization of diversity, so they are as likely to differ from one another as from traditional schools. Yet despite considerable differences among them, marking a range of persuasions from "fundamentalist" to "open," there seems extensive agreement on some matters.

We asked respondents how they differ most from typical local schools -- and hence, what they hold most distinctive about what they do. We listed ten possible areas of departure and invited the addition of others. Given the wide range of alternative school orientations and persuasions, the agreement was considerable: 63% named teacher-student interaction as one of their three points of greatest departure. Instructional methods came next in order of mention, curriculum and content third, and teacher roles fourth.

These views identify a substantial majority of alternative schools as wanting to move beyond the typical impersonal interactions found within conventional schools. They want to create different kinds of student-teacher relationships. Interestingly, re-fashioned interaction patterns are reported as major departures for all alternatives created for all reasons, save -- ironically -- those started to end school segregation. Perhaps it is the absence of this feature elsewhere perceived so central to alternative education which could account for cases of limited success in desegregation magnets.

Three of the four most frequently named departures from local practice concern teacher orientation, behavior, function. Thus, alternative school emphases seem to hold the teacher to be the central ingredient in educational improvement -- an assumption denied in some reform plans and itself the target of change in others. Curriculum, generally assumed to be the crux of what happens in school -- and a major target of several current reform efforts -- seems less critical to many alternative schools. Only 40% identify it as a major point of departure from standard practice. And even among the schools reporting curricular specialization, more of them emphasize their methods and interaction patterns than their curricula, as points of departure from usual practice. This might prove reassuring for those concerned that alternative schools tend to abandon standard content. We had expected more emphasis on curriculum and content, especially from magnet schools. Are there fewer of these than we thought? Or did our survey just not reach them? (Whatever the reasons, there is other evidence that we missed magnet schools -- e.g., the fact that racial diversity is identified by only 5% of our respondents as a major point of departure from other local schools, and that only 12% see segregation a major impetus to the creation of their school.)

Decision-making processes are cited as a distinctive feature by less than a quarter of our schools -- considerably fewer than might have been the case a decade ago. Apart from a continuing interest in the

"just community" schools associated with Kohlberg's theory of moral development, the broader commitment to participatory democracy seems to have waned. There are at least two quite plausible explanations. First, formal structures of any kind have never been long-lived in alternatives, especially complex shared governance schemes with their related demands on time and verbal ability. Informal arrangements are almost always preferred. Then, too, as alternatives evolve policies that are acceptable to all, interest abates in decision-making procedures and participation.

Quite a small number of responding schools identify school-parent interaction as a major point of departure: 12%. This means that even if such differences exist, few alternative school people attach first order importance to them, at least at the secondary school level. But if alternatives aren't working directly on the school-home link, their widely recognized record of parental support shows that there are a variety of ways in which approval can be won -- interaction being only one of them.

Learning Activities

Much of the difference between alternatives and other schools lies in the nature and breadth of teacher-student relationships. The commitment to new forms of interaction, reinforced by the small staff and the absence of specialists and other support systems, are central. Method of instruction was the focus named next most frequently as major point of departure, by 57% of our respondents. So teaching arrangements and activities are judged important. We asked about the specific experiences of substantial numbers of students within each program. Independent study was the single arrangement most often named (by 57%) -- which is not surprising in light of the alternative school's determination to be more responsive to the individual student than the comprehensive high school can be. We found that independent study is pursued more frequently in alternatives for average and above average achievers than in those where below average students are in the majority. This suggests that the independent study arrangement is more often used to allow for interests than for remediation needs.

Not surprisingly, multi-age and multi-grade-level learning is reported by nearly half our respondents -- perhaps necessitated by the small size of many alternatives. The peer teaching reported by 24% may be related to the multi-age feature -- although in some alternatives, students teach courses for peers of the same age- and grade-level. A number of respondents also added peer tutoring as a significant part of the program, distinguishing it from teaching. Perhaps it is some such arrangement that prompted one of our respondents to identify the program's most outstanding feature as "our one room schoolhouse approach to education."

Nearly a third of our respondents (31%) indicated that community service activities comprise a significant part of their programs. Such activities are most frequently reported by senior high school programs, and they are slightly more common among alternatives for average and above average than for below average students.

Extended field trips form an important part of the programs of 28% of our respondents. Such trips range from the camping experiences often called "intensives" in alternative schools, to the intervisitation arrangements with other programs which are a prominent feature of a number of Canadian alternatives. Several features of alternative education may account for the interest in such trips: their contribution to "community-building" among those within the program; the fact that they offer experiential or action learning possibilities and often occasion the need to earn trip costs; and the challenges the trips sometimes present. The intervisitation programs may also be prompted by a tendency toward self-consciousness about education itself -- a frequent object of study in alternative schools.

Emphases do vary in different types of schools. For example, more recently established alternatives tend to pursue a wider range of experiences than did earlier ones. Those beginning prior to 1970 tended primarily to emphasize multi-age learning and independent study; newer programs add a number of other features. This might suggest an evolving and expanding body of alternative school practice. Independent study seems as much a feature of large programs as of small, as are extended field trips.

Curriculum and Skills

Only half the alternatives we heard from specialize in particular curricula. The other half offer what is typical in their locales -- i.e., general diploma or college preparatory programs. Curricular specialization tends to follow alternatives targeted for particular ability groups. In districts where alternatives are associated with low achievers, 71% report specialization -- and 83%, where such schools are associated with gifted and talented students.

Among programs which declare a specialty, career and vocational education outnumbers college preparation by two to one: 68% of the specializing programs declare career/vocational education a curricular specialty. And 33% declare college preparation a specialty. Other orientations were mentioned rather infrequently, suggesting that such specialties of the early 70s as ethnic studies and outdoor education are not what is recommending alternatives to most of those choosing or operating them today.

Alternative schools stress basic skills, say 79% of our respondents. We did not define this term beyond parenthetically noting "reading, writing, computation," and the large group selecting it would suggest that to some it meant remedial emphases and to others, high level refinements in those skills: 65% of the programs specializing in college preparation reported basic skills their primary emphasis -- with 53% reporting learning skills and 45%, vocational/career skills.

There were some interesting correlations involving skill emphases: Urban alternatives were more likely than suburban to stress vocational/career skills; suburban were more likely than urban to stress human relations skills. The larger the alternative, the less likely that it

will depart from the skill emphases of the comprehensive high school: the larger alternatives tend to emphasize vocational/career, learning, and school skills more -- and human relations less -- than the smaller ones do. In alternatives where most entering students fall below local achievement norms, the skills emphasized are, in order of frequency, basic skills, human relations skills, and vocational/career skills. Where entering students are above achievement norms, the frequency order is learning skills, problem-solving skills, and basic skills.

One finding at least raises the question of whether the prospects of particular schools tally with educational needs generally: those alternatives which believe themselves safest are traditionally oriented, with large numbers emphasizing school and learning skills, or vocational/career skills. On the other hand, a search for connections between skill emphases and attendance changes revealed that the very few alternatives where attendance decreased (nine schools) all fail to emphasize either vocational/career skills or learning skills — i.e., they stress no skills specifically tied to success beyond high school for any group.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL

Alternative schools are different places from typical schools. They feel different and touch more of the lives of the staff and students who work within them. Many observers have associated this comprehensive difference in school environment or climate with both the satisfaction and the achievement levels often observed in alternatives. Accordingly, it seems worthwhile to review our findings from the general perspectives of alternative school staff and students. The descriptions which follow come largely from combining the individual features explored in previous pages, with an occasional supplement as noted.

How does the school look from a staff perspective? Alternative school teachers and directors typically work in small schools with relatively small numbers of students and fellow staff. The atmosphere is likely to be more that of a group of friends who chose to join together in a common enterprise than that of the usual workplace. There is more collaboration and camaraderie linking staff than is the case in most large high schools -- and the absence of departmental divisions and administrative levels enhances the spirit of common enterprise. Small size and informal governance arrangements make for the cooperative distribution of tasks instead of formal allocation by roles and assignment. Thus, jobs within the school are more likely to be arrived at on the basis of talent and preference than by assignment or mechanical rotation. And without the usual support staff of the comprehensive high school, those tasks are likely to be numerous and diverse.

Expectations of the teacher are quite different from those in the comprehensive high school. Facing five classes a day in regular schools, a teacher feels obliged to <u>try</u> to reach all students, through the application of standard good practice. But teacher obligation ends there. As observers have noted, however, alternative school parents, students, and colleagues are more likely to look to the teacher to succeed with all students -- even though that task may require a much wider array of strategies and techniques, and sometimes mean overcoming histories of failure and distrust. The alternative school is likely to define its mission in this regard as more akin to that of the family, which we do not expect to give up on a member because s/he fails, or resists assistance. The alternative school teacher as family member is likely to have to counsel students -- not as psychologist or therapist, but as concerned adult non-specialist interested in abetting growth.

As observers have noted, the only job likely to diminish considerably in the alternative school is the teacher's disciplinary role. The combination of fewer regulations and increased personalization generally makes for much better student behavior -- and accordingly, fewer adversarial situations, and less need to confront generational strife and opposition to authority. Otherwise than in this one important respect, however, the demands on alternative school teachers are likely to be greater than those on teachers in other schools.

The expectations are considerable, then. And how do teachers react to these enlarged expectations and duties? Very typically with higher morale than other teachers. They experience a strong feeling of

ownership of their programs, believing that they control the school and can modify it as needed. They are also able to experience considerable success -- sometimes fairly immediate and dramatic turn-arounds, such as the sudden regular appearance of previously chronic truants, or the decision of previous near dropouts to attend college (both of which are, according to reports, frequent occurrences in alternative schools). And despite the extended obligations and schedules, teachers in these programs are sufficiently interested and enthusiastic to be willing to take on even more professional activity: more than 90% of our respondents are interested in attending workshops, visiting other programs, exchanging materials.

The experience of the alternative school administrator is comparable. The role diffusion which has teachers participating in what are elsewhere administrative functions also affects administrators, placing them in closer contact with students and classrooms. They are likely to be doing a lot more of the things which brought them into education in the first place. And as the first NASP study noted, the role of the alternative school director appears "more consistent with our idealized notion of an 'educational leader'" than with the image of the management-minded administrator. The smallness, lack of hierarchy, collegiality are likely to generate effects on administrators quite similar to those on teachers. The director's "experience" of the alternative is likely, then, to be quite like that of the teacher.

And how do students see an alternative school? There is first the appearance of a warmer, more friendly environment -- which students express time and again in terms of "teachers really care." Students are likely to trust the adults in the school, viewing them as friends and collaborators (often titled "facilitators") rather than as superiors or adversaries. And they typically feel they receive far more help in the alternative, in doing work they find more interesting to do. They are likely to perceive the content as more appealing and valuable, and there is likely to be a larger assortment of ways to acquire it. Students respond enthusiastically to the much fuller variety of activities and events, with action or experiential learning a frequent possibility. In contrast to the large impersonal comprehensive high school in which the student must find his or her own way, the alternative school represents a welcoming community where inclusion is a deliberate feature. Thus, there are fewer cliques and less exclusion. From the student's perspective, the typical alternative school emphasis on human relations and interaction skills seems to yield constant opportunity and assistance in acquiring self-knowledge and coming to know others.

According to reports, many students are likely to encounter more consistent academic success than they have experienced previously, and they are likely to be a lot happier within the school than before — as revealed in their own reports, and their parents' reports, as well as in attendance figures. There is far less apathy and anomie than in many high schools. Going to school is likely to be a positive experience, and as thoroughly different an experience for alternative school students as for their teachers. In the eyes of many, it is precisely this change -- in the nature of the school experience itself -- which matters most and is more responsible for positive effects than are changes in curriculum or methods or physical surroundings.

Whether accurately or not, students perceive themselves to have much more control over their lives in the alternative school. The environment, then, feels less regulative and oppressive. There is a sense that one controls one's personal decisions, and typically that one also has a genuine voice in the decisions that constitute policy for all. There is a heightened sense of choice, and accordingly, of personal strength and empowerment. And according to reports, such feelings are typically joined by the experience of succeeding at assigned tasks and challenges. The combination -- of the sense of personal efficacy, choice, and success -- is the way many explain the new levels of achievement often reached by alternative school students. And that accomplishment in turn heightens the attractiveness of school.

Many alternative schools are experiencing varying degrees of insecurity as to their future. This threat may also play a part in heightening commitment and group coherence -- a somewhat perverse source of strength. But whether this is a major factor, or our findings are better explained by other causes, we found strong evidence that alternative schools typically represent groups of turned on teachers and turned on students.

SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE

How successful are alternative schools? There are limits to the kind and amount of information a tally of self-reports can yield. Nevertheless our data include several indicators related to the success question. We found, for instance, that attendance increases show alternative schools to be attractive places to their students. Replies to several of our questions suggest that teachers feel the same way. We received direct evidence of very busy people with enough commitment to be willing to assume even further obligations.

And these schools are not high-cost extras. Well over half are operating at equal or lower cost than comparable schools in their area. We conclude, then, that a number of them have managed success in fiscal terms. And in so doing, they have pioneered very different resource allocations from other schools, increasing labor intensity while decreasing plant and equipment outlays.

They have also pioneered new social forms, with what have become novel modes of affiliation in public schools, novel social control arrangements, and new varieties of learning activities. They have demonstrated, then, that there are quite different ways to approach and accomplish the mission of schooling.

Alternatives have combined an extensive array of programmatic variety -- hence considerable responsiveness and flexibility -- with a fair degree of institutional stability. Longevity is probably a rather poor measure of success -- it being possible both for excellent alternatives to lose their appeal to new generations, and for conventional schools that are poor to persist indefinitely. Nevertheless, it seems worth noting that large numbers of alternatives have become durable parts of their districts over the years.

One can point as well to areas of lesser success and remaining challenge. One such seems an ironic but inevitable counterpart of the success: as alternative schools have demonstrated their effectiveness and potential, they have been sought by a number of groups attempting to solve such disparate problems as segregation, juvenile crime, school violence and vandalism, and youth unemployment. The programs established in response to these problems have almost come to outnumber the programs established in the interests of providing better education -- with two important negative consequences.

First, not all of the alternative schools launched for such purposes have kept educational aims uppermost -- or pursued very sound educational practice. Thus, some alternatives have turned out to lack the very arrangements which recommend the type. Many of these have quite predictably proved rather ineffective. Perhaps of even greater long-term consequence, looking to alternatives as the way to handle the problem students has tended to link the alternatives idea to "special needs" populations. This, in turn, has not only brought stigma; but it has also pressed alternatives into service as a safety valve protecting the "regular" school and keeping it intact! It is ironic that a

school type established to show the viability of diversifying all education has in effect functioned in some places to maintain the 'one best system' arrangement.

Despite the successes, alternative schools have not yet managed to convince the bulk of the American people that all schools might deliberately differ from one another -- with all remaining of top quality and effectiveness. To put it in somewhat different terms, the alternatives movement, though fairly strong, remains rather distinct from the options movement -- at least in the minds of many. The result is that the continuing interest in choice, and all the current rhetoric on its behalf, fail somehow to attach to and benefit alternative schools. A major challenge appears to be bringing about a merger between the alternatives and options movements in education. And while this is not the place to consider how that might be done, perhaps an abandonment of the alternatives label might be a good starting point, in light of its negative connotations for many, and its increasingly confused use to cover everything from schools of choice to arrangements some have called "soft jails."

Our findings also point to some additional, internal challenges for schools of choice. Fewer than we had anticipated are pursuing particular programmatic features often thought to be associated with alternative education. Only 12% of our respondents reported school-parent interaction as a major point of departure from local practice, and only 11% cited school-community interaction in this connection. While the available evidence shows extremely high levels of parent support and satisfaction with alternative schools -- even, perhaps, in the absence of much interaction -- increased participation and involvement might be desirable.

A lot less is known about the reactions of the rest of the adult community explicitly to alternative schools. But figures on the declining number of adults with children in school suggest the increasing importance of this group. And data on public trust and confidence in schools and organizations generally would suggest that community involvement and interaction could be extremely desirable. This seems a particular opportunity for schools emphasizing experiential or action learning, as many alternatives do. In this and several other regards, community service seems a learning medium that might well be developed and extended beyond the alternatives now reporting it. It combines the opportunity for young people to become contributing members of their community with the chance for interaction and involvement with it.

Finally, we were surprised at the relatively small number (19%) reporting their schools to be targeted for students with particular learning styles. Since the argument for diversifying schools centers on meeting the needs of different kinds of students -- and since 57% of responding alternatives make instructional methods a major focus of their distinctiveness -- this prospectively powerful strategy for matching students and educations might desirably be more extensively pursued.

Still another sort of challenge also emerges from our findings. Although they confirm a lot of hypotheses and provide important disconfirmations for others, they simply mark the beginnings of the kind of

knowledge about alternative schools that will be maximally useful. For example, here are an assortment of questions and speculations to which the survey has led us:

- Concerning program origins, how successful are "replicated" programs imported from elsewhere and/or designed from the start for duplication?
- Do magnet schools usually differ less from standard school practice than do other alternatives -- departing only with respect to curriculum?
- Of the several sorts tried to date, what kinds of initiatives related to alternative education seem to yield the most successful programs?
- What are the features of alternative schools which draw youngsters across racial and class lines?
- What kinds of options might best prevent the flight from urban schools?
- Which kinds of alternatives accomplish what for which students?

In short, much remains to be seen before we can answer the question articulating the Project on Alternatives in Education, "Which alternatives well serve which youngsters, in relation to which educational values?" But the survey has marked an important step in that direction.

PROJECT ON ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION

National Survey of Public Alternative Schools
Fall 1981

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Grades offered at this school. (Circle ALL that apply.)

   K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 see Table 1

2. What year did your alternative first admit students?

   19 __

3. What year did you first work at this school?

   19 __

4. What do you think were the main factors leading to the initial creation of your school? (Check ALL that apply.)

   1☐ Student dropout and truancy rates 65%
   1☐ Student underachievement 44%
   1☐ Student dissatisfaction and apathy 46%
   1☐ Discipline problems 51%
   1☐ Unmet needs of particular student groups 65%
   1☐ Parent pressure 14%
   1☐ Staff interests 32%
   1☐ School segregation 12%
   1☐ Other (Specify) 18%

5. Which of the following people become affiliated with your alternative primarily as a matter of genuine choice, as opposed to assignment or forced choice? (Check ALL that apply.)

   1☐ Students 79%
   1☐ Teachers 85%
   1☐ Administrators 69%
   1☐ Staff 55%

6. What is your current student enrollment?

   ⌊_⌊_⌊_⌊_⌋ enrollment see Table IV

7. What kind of student does your district (central administration and board) associate with alternative education? (Check ONE.)

   1☐ All kinds of students 73%
   2☐ Low achievers 3%
   3☐ Disruptive 8%
   4☐ Turned off or disinterested 9%
   5☐ Gifted or talented 3%
   6☐ Other (Specify) 5%

8. Is your program targeted specifically for students with particular learning styles?

   1☐ Yes 19%
   2☐ No 81%

   If YES, what major style(s)?

9. Which of the following most accurately describes your program's organizational type or status? (Check ONE.)

   1☐ A school within a school, or a mini-school 20%
   2☐ A separate school 38%
   3☐ A satellite school or annex 9%
   4☐ A school without walls 1%
   5☐ A school cooperatively maintained by several districts 3%
   6☐ A course offering within the parent school 8%
   7☐ A remedial or corrective program to which students are assigned on a temporary basis 13%
   8☐ Other (specify) 8%

10. Within your school, what is the number of people (in fulltime equivalents) in each of the following categories?

    a. Director(s) or administrator(s) ⌊_⌊_⌋
    b. Teachers ⌊_⌊_⌊_⌋
    c. Counselors ⌊_⌊_⌋
    d. Interns and/or student teachers ⌊_⌊_⌋
    e. Aides ⌊_⌊_⌊_⌋
    f. Secretaries ⌊_⌊_⌋
    g. Custodians ⌊_⌊_⌋
    h. Others (Specify) see Table A

11. In relation to the standard secondary education program in your district, are your per pupil expenses:

    1☐ Greater 38%
    2☐ Less 21%
    3☐ About the same 41%

12. In relation to other schools in your district, has your enrollment over the past several years:

    1☐ Grown 45%
    2☐ Declined 14%
    3☐ Remained about the same 41%

13. In what ways does your alternative differ *most* from typical schools in the district? *Rank* the three areas of greatest departure by putting numbers in boxes (ONE (1) is highest. *Rank* NOT more than 3.)

- [1] Curriculum and content 40%
- [1] Methods of instruction 57%
- [1] Decision-making spheres and processes 23%
- [1] Teacher-student interaction (other than in decision-making) 63%
- [1] Method of grading 10%
- [1] Teacher roles and functions 33%
- [1] Administrative/organizational structure 14%
- [1] Racial diversity of students 5%
- [1] School-parent interaction 12%
- [1] School-community interaction 11%
- [1] Other (specify) 7%

14. Which of the following best describes the present prospects for your alternative program? (Check ONE.)

- [1] We are much safer than regular programs in the school system. 8%
- [2] We are as safe as regular programs in the school system. 39%
- [3] We are somewhat less secure than regular programs in the school system. 40%
- [4] We are in danger of not surviving. 13%

SECTION II: STUDENT INFORMATION

15. What percent of your students fall within the following categories? See Tables III and VII

	0%	1-19%	20-39%	40-59%	60-79%	80-99%	100%
a. Female	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
b. Male	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
c. Asian	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
d. Black	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
e. Hispanic	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
f. American Indian	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
g. English is a second language	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
h. Come from urban homes.	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
i. Come from suburban homes	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
j. Come from rural homes	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
k. Come from lower-class homes	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[5]	[7]
l. Come from middle-class homes	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
m. Come from upper class homes	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]

16. Upon entrance, are the majority of your students functioning: (Check ONE.)

- [1] Below school district academic achievement norms 69%
- [2] At school district academic norms 25%
- [3] Above school district academic achievement norms 6%

17. Upon entrance, are the majority of your students functioning: (Check ONE.)

- [1] Below district behavioral norms 62%
- [2] At district behavioral norms 30%
- [3] Above district behavioral norms 8%

18. Compared to their patterns at previous schools, student attendance in the alternative program has: (Check ONE.)

- [1] Greatly increased 38%
- [2] Increased 43%
- [3] Remained about the same 18%
- [4] Decreased 0.8%
- [5] Greatly decreased —

SECTION III: DECISION-MAKING

19. How much autonomy does your school have in each of the following areas? (Mark ONE box in each row.)

	None	Some	A lot	Full
a. Course content...	1☐ 4%	2☐ 21%	3☐ 45%	4☐ 31%
b. Teaching/learning activities	1☐ –	2☐ 8%	3☐ 42%	4☐ 50%
c. Staff selection ...	1☐ 10%	2☐ 26%	3☐ 35%	4☐ 28%
d. Student behavior rules.....	1☐ 2%	2☐ 12%	3☐ 43%	4☐ 44%
e. Student selection .	1☐ 14%	2☐ 22%	3☐ 31%	4☐ 34%
f. Program planning.	1☐ –	2☐ 9%	3☐ 43%	4☐ 48%
g. Student evaluation format	1☐ 3%	2☐ 13%	3☐ 34%	4☐ 50%

20. Which people in your school have a *significant* role in making decisions in the following areas? (Check ALL that apply.)

	Parents	Teachers	Students
a. Student discipline	1☐ 28%	1☐ 99%	1☐ 45%
b. Student admission	1☐ 52%	1☐ 78%	1☐ 47%
c. Hiring of staff ...	1☐ 11%	1☐ 97%	1☐ 14%
d. Formal evaluation of staff	1☐ 14%	1☐ 89%	1☐ 27%
e. Allocation of school budget ..	1☐ 14%	1☐ 96%	1☐ 8%
f. School goals	1☐ 31%	1☐ 98%	1☐ 48%
g. Courses available .	1☐ 17%	1☐ 98%	1☐ 44%
h. Courses taken....	1☐ 31%	1☐ 80%	1☐ 75%
i. Course content...	1☐ 11%	1☐ 100%	1☐ 36%

SECTION IV: EVALUATION

21. Who is regularly involved in formal program evaluation in your school? (Check ALL that apply.)

1☐ Alternative school personnel 67%
1☐ Other school district personnel 56%
1☐ Outside evaluators 33%
1☐ Have no formal program evaluation 15%

22. Which of the following methods *best* describes what you do in evaluating students? (Check ONE.)

1☐ Comparative (student's performance weighed against others') 9%
2☐ Criterion-references (student's performance judged against specific educational objectives) 36%
3☐ Individual (performance judged against expectations for that student) 57%
4☐ Other (specify) 4% _____

SECTION V: CURRICULUM AND ACTIVITIES

23. Does your program specialize in one or two specific curricular orientations?

1☐ Yes 51%
2☐ No 49%

If YES, which areas? (Check NO more than two.)

1☐ College preparation 33%
1☐ Career and vocational education 68%
1☐ Outdoor education 7%
1☐ Environmental education 6%
1☐ Cross cultural or ethnic studies 8%
1☐ Fine arts 8%
1☐ Other (specify) 29% _____

24. Which of the following skills does your curriculum emphasize most, for most students? (Check NO more than three.)

1☐ Vocational/career skills 40%
1☐ Human relations skills 52%
1☐ Life planning skills 31%
1☐ Problem-solving skills 34%
1☐ Learning skills (critical, analytic thinking) 28%
1☐ Basic skills (reading, writing, computation) 79%
1☐ School skills (study habits, test-taking) 22%

25. Which of the following experiences are a significant part of your school's program (claiming time equivalent to at least that of a course), for substantial numbers of students (i.e., one-third or more)? (Check ALL that apply.)

1☐ Community service 31%
1☐ Independent study 57%
1☐ Peer teaching 24%
1☐ Multi-age/grade learning 49%
1☐ Outdoor education 16%
1☐ Off-campus courses 16%
1☐ Extended field trips 28%
☐ Other (specify) 15% _____

SECTION VII: NETWORKING/ PARTICIPATION INTERESTS

26. Are you or others at your school interested in:

	Yes	No
a. Intervisitation programs with other alternatives	91% 1☐	2☐
b. Attending alternative education workshops	91% 1☐	2☐
c. Offering alternative education workshops	60% 1☐	2☐
d. Exchanging materials with other alternatives	93% 1☐	2☐
e. Networking (beyond what you may be doing now) with other alternative school people	83% 1☐	2☐
f. Student swaps	42% 1☐	2☐
g. Staff swaps	51% 1☐	2☐
h. Other collaborative activities (please specify) _____	39% 1☐	2☐

_____

_____

27. Do you wish to receive a copy of the results of this survey?

1☐ Yes 97%
2☐ No 3%

28. Do you wish to be on the PAE mailing list to receive other materials on alternative schools and education?

1☐ Yes 97%
2☐ No 3%

29. Do you wish to contribute ideas and materials to a periodic newsletter on alternatives?

1☐ Yes 77%
2☐ No 23%

30. Please check the enclosed list of other alternative schools we know about in your state—and add the names and addresses of any we've missed. We are doing our best to make this a *comprehensive* survey of public alternative high schools. (Write names and addresses on back or enclose a sheet.)

31. A final (optional) question for the directory we hope to get funds to do:

What do you think is the single most outstanding feature of your alternative program?

_____

_____

Appendix B

PREVIOUS ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SURVEYS

"National Consortium for Options in Public Education: Directory of Alternative Public Schools," Changing Schools, No. 008, (1972), pp. 1-18.

Thomas E. Wolf, Michael Walker, Robert A. Mackin, Summary of the NASP Survey, 1974 (Amherst: National Alternative Schools Program, University of Massachusetts, 1974) (mimeo).

Robert D. Barr, "The Growth of Alternative Public Schools: The 1975 ICOPE Report," Changing Schools, No. 12 (3:4, 1975), pp. 1-10.

National School Boards Association, Research Report: Alternative Schools (Evanston, Ill.: The Association, 1976).

Anne Flaxman and Kerry Christensen Homstead, 1977-78 National Directory of Public Alternative Schools (Amherst: National Alternative Schools Program, University of Massachusetts, 1978).

Appendix C

ABOUT THE SURVEY AND ITS HISTORY

We began with the aim of finding and surveying every public secondary alternative school in the nation -- intending a census, rather than a sample. As events developed, that goal became impossible, despite extensive efforts and generous assistance from others. Months later, we are still finding programs we didn't know about, and we are still sending out and receiving questionnaire forms. Our initial mailing list totalled 2200 schools and we have since located 300 more. We had 1121 replies in time for computer analysis, and there are now 100 additional replies that will go into updates we hope to do later.

There are probably two to three times the number of alternatives we found. But it is unlikely that anyone will be able to confirm such an estimate, for several reasons. One is that the different administrative location of programs in different states and districts makes it impossible to know where to seek information. And one office within a system is not always aware of the resources and programs of another. Thus, we doubtless failed to identify whole sets of alternatives in some locales. Then too, since many school districts have central administrators handle all out-of-district communications, we were not always given names and addresses of local programs. We received a number of survey forms done as composite descriptions of multiple programs. And some districts reported a policy of selecting just one program taken as somehow representative of a number, for reports and "showcasing." These and other obstacles strongly suggest that no inquiry will ever have the time and resources to complete a full national roster. And we're not sure of the kinds of bias introduced in our data by not having a <u>total</u> census.

In the summer of 1981, we began on locating public alternative secondary schools and designing a survey instrument that would best gather and display information about them, without burdening the respondent too much. Our initial list came from a number of sources: alternative school friends across the country, state department of education officials, and superintendents of schools in towns and cities of more than 50,000 population. (We wrote to all of these seeking names of schools.) As indicated in our acknowledgments, a number of individuals and organizations shared their mailing lists, and others helped us in other ways to build our own.

We initially planned to limit our focus to alternatives at the secondary level. However, the boundary proved difficult to maintain. We wanted to include junior high alternatives along with senior high schools -- and the overlap in age and grade levels also made middle schools logical candidates for inclusion. This in turn recommended elementary schools extending into seventh and eighth grades. And we did not want to omit K-12 alternatives. This is how our respondents came to include the array of organizational types and grade levels that are shown on page 6.

We initially planned to restrict our survey not only to the secondary-school level, but also to alternatives in public schools. It became evident, however, that the public-private distinction also is not always so sharply drawn. Thus, our respondents include several privately owned alternatives which are directly or indirectly maintained by public school districts. We also listed schools for Native Americans, and some of the responding programs informed us that they are tribally owned and not formally categorized as public.

Our initial intent was to confine our survey to the United States. We were disappointed by the decision of the superintendent not to permit Hawaiian alternatives to participate. On the other hand, two Canadian provinces asked to become involved, and others joined them. Thus, there are a few Canadian alternatives included in our totals. (Canadian interest in and development of alternative education appear sufficient to warrant including the other provinces as well, and they will be added to updates of this report.)

We devised our questionnaire with an eye both to earlier surveys, and to our own future research plans which will in part build upon these findings. This report was written for school people and school policymakers. It is possible that PAE will be preparing other reports of the survey, for different audiences. Meanwhile, we will be glad to make our printouts available in the Project offices to other researchers interested in examining the original data.

In reporting our findings, we have consistently used percentages, and these are based on adjusted frequencies throughout.

Project on Alternatives in Education

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Education Commission of the States

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Education Association

ABOUT PAE

The individuals and sponsoring organizations comprising the Project on Alternatives in Education are identified to the left of this page, which doubles as letterhead. PAE was launched to dual purposes: research and reform. The research is concerned with the multiple questions involved in determining what kinds of education well serve which youngsters, and which educational goals and values. It will employ various inquiry approaches, including the involvement as researchers of people in the schools being studied.

PAE's reform goals will be met by helping people in various kinds of alternative schools to refine their practice and improve their effectiveness. We expect to make the results of this experience available to other educators and education decision-makers in a variety of ways.

The materials produced by PAE, in addition to this survey report, are:

- Directory: Public Secondary Alternative Schools in the United States and Several Canadian Provinces. 160 pp. Single copies $7.00. This is a state-by-state listing of the names and addresses of the 2500 alternative schools we located. It does not include annotations.

- A comprehensive literature review of the material published on alternative education in the last dozen years is now nearing completion. It will cover approximately 800 articles, reports, monographs, etc. pertaining to educational alternatives.

- Some useful tentative findings about alternative schools are already available. Based on these, PAE has prepared a series of advice sheets dealing with such questions as designing alternatives for success and "keeping afloat." These sheets are distributed (free) in response to inquiries from teachers, administrators, and others. They are disseminated with the aid of Hofstra University's Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives.

- A conceptualization manuscript on alternative education -- an extended definition -- is under way. Its working title is The Alternative in Alternatives. The work is being field tested and publication will follow revisions.